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PATTERN OF VIOLENCE

Lithuania is Latest Example of Soviet Army's Use of Lethal Force

At least six times during Gorbachev's leadership, Soviet forces, armed for battle, have arrived at the scenes of demonstrations and attacked largely unarmed civilian populations, killing a total of nearly 200 and wounding hundreds more. The use of force by the Soviet army in Lithuania on January 13 and 14 was thus a familiar scenario.

Helsinki Watch strongly condemns the gross violations of human rights that have occurred in Lithuania at the hands of the Soviet army. There is no justification under Soviet or international law for the use of force in seizing various buildings in Vilnius, Kaunas and elsewhere. Soviet forces have fired on unarmed civilians without provocation, resulting in at least fifteen deaths. As a result of the forcible seizure of press, television and radio facilities, the free media in Lithuania has been sharply curtailed. Measures such as the curfew, banning of demonstrations and other curtailments of civil liberties similarly violate Soviet and international law. The question of independence aside, the nature of the military action in Lithuania indicates that its goal is the forcible removal of the democratically elected government.

The Soviet government and the Soviet armed forces have created unrest and human rights violations in Lithuania and threaten similar unrest and violations in other republics in the Soviet Union. Helsinki Watch calls on the Soviet government to remove its forces from Lithuania, restore the elected government and restore and protect all human rights.

In the past 5 years, the Soviet army has killed peaceful demonstrators in at least five other republics: Azerbaidzhan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan. [See below] The Soviet Defense Minister has recently announced its intention to compel compliance with the draft in Estonia, Latvia, Armenia, Moldavia, Georgia, and the Ukraine, as well as in Lithuania. Helsinki Watch calls on the Soviet Union to respect the elected governments in these and all other republics, and to take steps to ensure that the tragedy in Lithuania is not repeated elsewhere.

* Casualty figures may include soldiers or civilians who were killed or wounded by other civilians.

SIX CASES OF SOVIET ARMY'S UNJUSTIFIED USE OF LETHAL FORCE

(I) December 1986 in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan

Official Death Toll: 3

Unofficial Death Toll: 168 (17 unofficial Kazakhstan groups plus two Soviet Army officers have cited this number)*

Wounded: More than 655 (hospital records indicate 369 in-patient, 286 out-patient cases)*

Army Weapons: Sappers' shovels; dogs; steel rods

Protestors' Weapons: Stones; saplings

Number Detained: Over 600 (unofficial estimate of "Zheltoksan" Commission)

Number of Protestors Sentenced: 99 (unofficial)

Official Investigation: Kazakhstan Supreme Soviet Commission formed in 1989

Action Taken: Called for removal of officials responsible

Official Response: No officials removed

Unofficial Investigation: "Zheltoksan" Commission formed in 1989; Helsinki Watch mission and report issued, 1990

Action Taken: "Zheltoksan" recommended rehabilitation of those convicted

Official Response: Partial rehabilitation of some former prisoners

(II) April 1989 in Tbilisi, Georgia

Official Death Toll: 20

Wounded: 150-200 (number hospitalized immediately after attack; based on Georgian Ministry of Health data) of

Army Weapons: Sappers' shovels; poison and tear gas

Protestors' Weapons: None

Number of Protestors Sentenced: None

Official Investigations: Georgian and USSR Supreme Soviet Commissions formed in 1989

Action Taken: Findings issued that did not establish who gave order to use force

Unofficial Investigations: Physicians for Human Rights, 1989; International Committee of the Red Cross, 1989

(III) June 1989 in Kokand, Uzbekistan

Unofficial Death Toll: 50 (from "Birlik" Commission)*

Wounded: 200 (unofficial estimate from "Birlik" Commission)*

Army Weapons: Automatic rifles

Protestors' Weapons: None

Number of Protestors Sentenced: Unknown

Official Investigation: None

Unofficial Investigations: "Birlik" Commission formed in 1990; Helsinki Watch mission, 1990

*Casualty figure may include soldiers or civilians who were killed or wounded by other civilians.

(IV) January 1990 in Baku, Azerbaidzhan

Official Death Toll: 131 (plus 25 soldiers, according to Soviet military)*

Wounded: 700 (official estimate)*

Army Weapons: Automatic rifles, tanks

Protestors' Weapons: Stones, bottles, hunting rifles

Number of Protestors Arrested: 650 (unofficial estimate)

Official Investigations: Azerbaidzhan Supreme Soviet Commission began in 1990; Military Procuracy Investigation began in 1990

Action Taken: Neither investigative group has issued findings to date

Unofficial Investigations: "Shchit" ("Shield") group issued report, 1990; Helsinki Watch mission, 1990 (report to follow)

(V) February 1990 in Dushanbe, Tadzhikistan

Unofficial Death Toll: 7 (reported in "Kommersant" newspaper)

Wounded: More than one hundred (unofficial estimate)*

Army Weapons: Automatic rifles, tanks

Protestors' Weapons: Stones, shoes

Number of Protestors Arrested: 120 (unofficial estimate)

Official Investigation: Tadzhikistan Supreme Soviet Commission formed in 1990

Action Taken: Issued findings critical of Republic KGB

Unofficial Investigation: Helsinki Watch mission, 1990 (report to follow)

(VI) January 1991 in Vilnius, Lithuania

Official Death Toll: 15 (from Lithuanian government)

Wounded: 331 (from Lithuanian government)

Army Weapons: Automatic rifles, tanks

Protestors' Weapons: Sticks

Number of Protestors Arrested: None

Official Investigation: USSR Federation Council

Action Taken: None to date

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News From Helsinki Watch is a publication of Helsinki Watch, an independent organization created in 1979 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Chairman is Robert L. Bernstein; Vice Chair, Jonathan Fanton and Alice Henkin; Executive Director, Jeri Laber; Deputy Director, Lois Whitman; Washington Representative, Catherine Cosman; Staff Counsel, Holly Cartner and Theodore Zang, Jr.; Orville Schell Intern, Robert Kushen; Intern, Jemima Stratford; Associates, Sarai Brachman and Elisabeth Socolow.

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